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International Children Adoptions in Finland:

An attachment perspective

Bachelor's Thesis

Moses Wachira

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## ABSTRACT

<b>Author:</b> Moses Wachira
<b>Title of thesis:</b> International Adoptions in Finland: An attachment perspective
<b>Pages (+Appendices):</b> 45 (+1)
<p><b>Thesis description:</b> In this thesis, I will consider the factors that attachment has on the case of adopted children in Finland. I seek to identify the effects of children adopted to Finland in regard to the attachments they strive to form with their new caregivers, and how they strive to build close bonds with their new internationally adopted children.</p> <p><b>Theoretical and conceptual summary:</b> Attachment is seen as the basis of a child's start to development. The separation and/or loss of a caregiver in the life of a child affects the personal development of a child and in cases of a traumatic early life, the child becomes withdrawn from reality. Continuity of care through adoption is seen as a better alternative for children who may be lacking proper care.</p> <p><b>Methodological summary:</b> This thesis utilised a case study qualitative research method. To garner information, I used interviews, documented research material and an open ended questionnaire. The interviews were essential in obtaining concrete evidence of the situation regarding the internationally adopted children and their new caregivers.</p> <p><b>Main results:</b> The results showed that attachment is important in fostering a positive adoption process, and creating a better connection for the internationally adopted child in Finland. The results also showed that internationally adopted children have an urge to prosper despite the challenges they have gone through. Nurturing them in the new society is important to help them to fulfil this urge. The culture of the child's country of origin needs to be considered while nurturing them.</p> <p><b>Conclusions:</b> Active participation of both the adoptive parents and social workers is beneficial in the development for the adopted child in adapting to the new environment they find themselves in after adoption.</p>
<b>Key words:</b> international adoption, internationally adopted child, caregiver, attachment, attachment theory.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

International adoptions have been in existence for many centuries all over the world. They have been effectively been used to offer substitute care for children who have been left without proper care or without a proper family upbringing. Adoptions have received a wide acclamation in recent decades in Finland, with the shift moving away from domestic adoptions to international adoptions. The momentum is on the fast track, meaning that international adoptions are gaining popularity ever than before in Finland, and also in the rest of the world at large (Finland adoption Board 2009. 54).

Although the figure of internationally adopted children has been generally low in most of the years, the trend is now gaining momentum with more adoption applications being submitted than ever before. The Finnish Adoption Board, which is mandated to carry out all the adoption processes in by the Ministry of Health and Welfare, has had a fair share of improvements due to decrees and acts that seek to offer better adoption tactic and guarantee safe adoption procedures. In this light, the average age of the number of children adopted internationally in Finland is on the rise (Finland Adoption Board 2009. 54) In this thesis, I shall seek to know how why this is so, and to what effect this has on the whole international adoption process. I shall seek to demystify the effects that age has on the process of adoption, and the current trials and tribulations in the international adoptions process, and how they have affect on Finland. I shall explain the process involved, coupled with the complexity of finding children ready for adoption in Finland.

Adoptions arise from the need to offer children with a better life condition where there is none or is lacking. In earlier times, children were viewed as miniature adults, but in the turn of the twentieth century, the focus changed, and children were viewed as fragile, innocent and vulnerable to victimization. Globalisation may have effect on this, as the turn of the twentieth century saw the unfolding of two World Wars. As we all well know, civilians suffer most in event of war. Children especially are affected most, as they are incapable of fending for themselves in the even they lose their parents. International treaties and laws nowadays guarantee children with rights, which allow for their personal development and growth. To this way of thinking, children are not little adults, smaller and less skilled workers, funnier and cuter participants in all human relationships, but rather occupants of a distinct stage of life — innocent, in need of special protection, and deserving shelter from life's harshness (Marre & Briggs 2009. 2).

Many families considering adopting may be hampered by the fact that adoption is a cumbersome process. In this regard, I will define the adoption process as it is in Finland, and create awareness of it. This information is vital in connecting the strides that adoptive parents make in ensuring a safe livelihood for their adopted child. This means the prospective adoptive parents attitudes towards the child matter on the type of relationship they eventually have in future. And these relationships imply forming an attachment.

The main questions that have led me to research on the topic of attachment and international adoptions in Finland are:

- What are the problems encountered during and after the process of international adoptions in Finland, and
- How do the adoptive parents cope with them during and after a successful adoption procedure?

I shall seek to engage in the topic of early attachments, and cater for solutions and viewpoints on how to overcome the difficulties in attachment. Most of the research material will be acquired through the research work done on early childhood attachments by John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth (Bowlby, 1979; Ainsworth, et al 1970). I will shed light on the various attachment categories involving children in their early stages of life, and the outcomes of different care methods' impact on their development. The purpose of this research paper is analyze the effect of the current adoption trend has an effect in the post adoption process. We shall seek to demystify the concerns of international adoptions.

## 2 INTER-COUNTRY ADOPTIONS IN FINLAND

### 2.1 Adoption and Adoption Laws

Adoption is a process by which a family seeks legality to raise another child as its own, that is “to take [a child] into one's family through legal means and raise as one's own child” (Free dictionary 2011). Adoption is a way to create a family outside of biological means (Sember 2004. 3). This means that when a child is adopted into a new family, s/he bears the same rights as of those children born in a biological way. The link between the child's biological parents is cut off, and assumes a new identity with the new family. The child is given a new birth certificate that bears the names of the new parent(s) as his/her own.

In Finland, only three adoption agencies are involved in the process of adoptions. These are Interpedia Ry, Pelastakaa Lapset Ry (Save the Children) and the City of Helsinki Social Welfare Board. The same agencies also are mandated to carry out services for international adoptions. As of 2009, a total number of 3,644 international adoptees had arrived in Finland since 1985 (when the Adoption Act came into force), notwithstanding the fact that it handled 381 adoption permission applications in 2009 (Ministry of Social Affairs 2010). At this moment, the number of applications for international adoption in Finland is on the rise.

The provisions regulating child adoption and the relations between adoptive children and their parents are included in the Adoption Act (153/1985). The adoption act was drawn up in accordance with the regulations stated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child, which states that:

“Children have the right to care and protection if they are adopted or in foster care. The first concern must be what is best for them. The same rules should apply whether they are adopted in the country where they were born, or if they are taken to live in another country”

(Article 21)

This decree guarantees the legality of adopted children in Finland from other countries, whereas further provisions for conformity of legalities of international adoptions are based on the contained



in the Decree on the Finnish Board of Inter-Country Adoption Affairs (508/1997). The Finnish Adoption Board is a statutory organ under the Ministry of social affairs and health entailed to oversee all the processes regarding adoption in Finland. Granting permissions for inter-country adoption is the most significant task of the Board (Finnish Adoption Board 2009). Finland is a member of the Hague Convention, having ratified it in 1997. This means that Finland mainly accepts adoptions from countries that have formally ratified the Convention. The Hague convention was commissioned to procure new sets of rules and regulations to ensure a fair international adoption process among its member states. Majority of the internationally adopted children to Finland originate from Russia, China, Thailand, South Africa, Colombia and Ethiopia – countries that have already ratified the convention. (Finnish Board of Inter-Country Adoption Affairs 2010).

Finland is also a founding and active member of the Nordic Adoption Council, which was set up in 1995. The purpose of the Nordic Adoption Council is to achieve, through cooperation between the member organizations, good conditions in the Nordic countries for international adoptions and good conditions in which the adopted children can grow (NAC 2011).

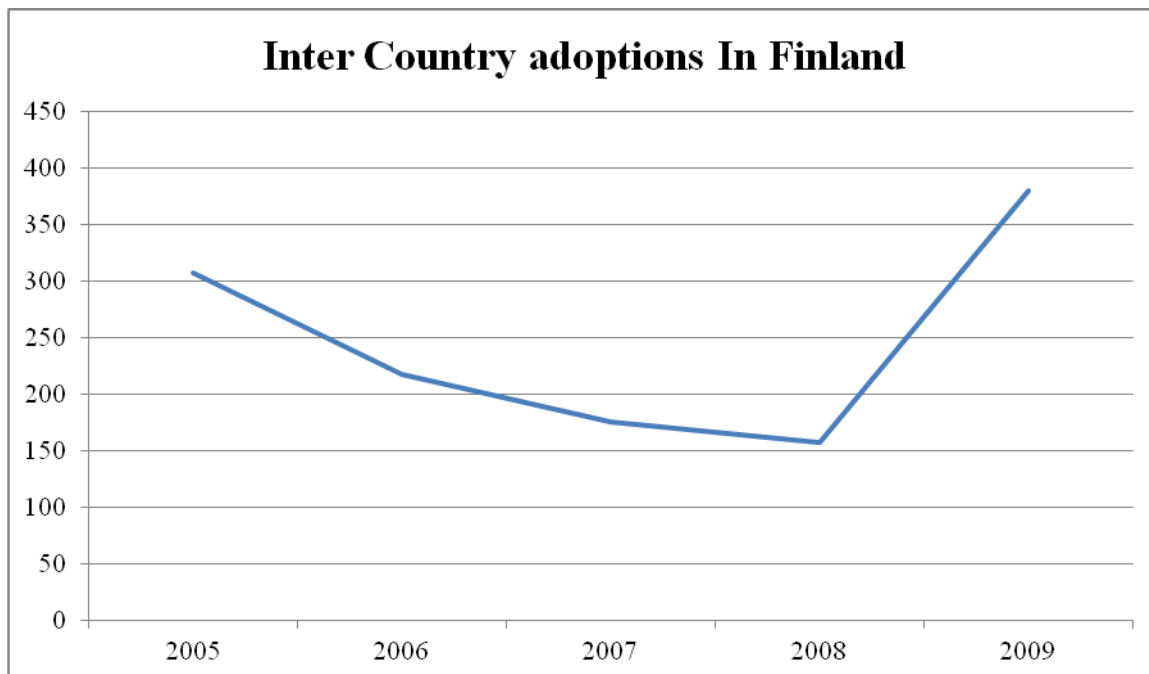


Fig 1 Internationally adopted children in Finland between 2005 and 2009.

The above diagram is a representation of the number of children adapted from abroad to Finland within a span of five years, from year 2005. It shows a gradual decrease in the number of adopted children from years 2005 to 2008 and a sudden increase in the year 2009. Compared to the previous years' trends, the number of applications for international adoption seems to be on the increase as international adoptions are simultaneously on the rise. There are many reasons for the gradual decrease of children coming to Finland, ranging from the needs of the prospective parents such as the age or sex of the child, to competition among the receiving states or legal factors in the sending countries that hamper or slow down the adoption process. Legislation in majority of the sending countries is changing. Many countries now prefer to find a suitable family willing to adopt a child in its own country. An example is that of China. In 2004 and 2005, almost half of the internationally adopted children in Finland and all over the world came from China, which has recently begun to favour domestic adoption, leading to an increase in the waiting time for adoptions to Finland over the past few years (Virkki 2009). The downside of this is that this results in rather older children who are now available for adoption for the receiving countries. The waiting period lasts for a period of five years from when the adoption process is approved, including the counselling period. Counselling usually takes a period of one year, and then the waiting period in search of a prospective child for adoptions consumes the rest of the five year period. When the waiting period expires, the prospective adoptive parents are required to re apply again for a new adoption process, but counselling is necessarily not required in this instance.

## 2.2 Process of International Adoptions in Finland

In Finland, the process of adoption starts with counselling. All parents who wish to adopt have to receive counselling and use the services of agencies accredited by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, and must obtain a permit to adopt from the Finnish Board of Inter-Country Adoption (Högbacka 2008. 4) During counselling, the prospective parent is trained to be aware of the possibilities and challenges involved with adopting a child. This is used as a means to improve the social situation of the yet to be adopted child. 'Nowadays, many times, especially older children or children with special needs are available for international adoption. This creates a situation where adoptive parents need to be more trained to confront the possible challenges that their children might face' (Virkki 2009). Any social worker involved in the counselling procedure must hold a

university degree in the field of social work. This is to ensure that the process of adoption viewed and catered as a highly professionalized job, seeking to provide the best in terms of service to both the adopted child and the new parent(s).

Persons wishing to adopt in Finland need to follow certain guidelines, and laws determining the possibilities to adopt are in place. The main criteria that permit application for adoption process are as follows:

- Applicants must be at least 25 years of age, but usually there is no upper age limit. However, the general rule is that the age difference between the adoptive parents and the child's range does not exceed 45 years.
- Only married couples can adopt a child together, thus unmarried couples cannot adopt. This means that same sex (gay or lesbian) couples or cohabiting partners are not allowed to adopt children in Finland.
- A single person can apply for adoption.

(Interpedia Ry 2011)

Municipal social workers are mandated with a task to determine the competence of the family seeking to adoption, and how familiar they are with the tasks of raising an adopted child. In other cases, social workers from Pelastakaa Lapset Ry (Save the Children) may be used in the counselling stage. One of the purposes of counselling is "to encourage prospective adoptive parents to the process of self-evaluation". (Kumpumäki 2006) Emphasis is put on this notion because the motivation, guidance and care for the adopted child are an uphill task. The prospective parents are required to make their own assessment of their capabilities to bring up an adopted child. The changes that arise from adopting a child from abroad are more diverse and need to be addressed both by the prospective adoption parents and social workers, and as such, the environment on which the child matures up in must be conducive for his intellectual, emotional and physical growth.

One of the several things an adoptive couple go through is a background check from the adoption agency, to verify a good habitation of the child. When the social worker makes home visits, s/he comes prepared to assess the prospective adoptive parents' family background to determine issues of childhood and association with the extended family. This is an essential attribute, in that the expected child should not find a hostile environment characterized by a member of the family towards him/her. The social worker 'must be in possession of all the facts about the characteristics and needs of the child and the abilities and limitations of prospective parents' (Cantwell 2010). In

Finland, average income families are free to adopt. The only major costs that arise during adoptions come when the family needs to travel to the sending country, and the prospective parents need to pay for the costs involved in this endeavour. The Finnish National Social Insurance (KELA) provides grants to offset some of the costs associated with adoption. The grant is given when an international adoption agency has selected a child in the custody of the prospective parents and the Finnish Board of Intercountry Adoption Affairs has given authority over the adoption (Kela 2011).

After the counselling period, the social worker submits a written report to the National Adoption Board based in Helsinki documenting the findings and nature of the prospective parents, who make a decision either to let the parent(s) adopt or not. There only major grounds for issuance of a negative decision would be if the ages of either prospective parents is not within the legal range, or if one of the parents has chronic illness that may affect the development of the adopted child, or if the parents do not have a stable income.

Most often, the recommendation of the social worker turns out to be positive, and an adoption request is granted to the parents. At this stage, they choose one of the three adoption agencies in Finland to assist in the process of finding a suitable child for them. After choosing the local adoption agency to facilitate the adoption process, the prospective parents are provided with information about the countries they wish to adopt from and the legal requirements from the country they choose to adopt from. The legislation, regulation and policies in the sending countries often change, with very little notice given. These changes usually turn out to be trivial as they can delay the process of international adoption, and in some cases, stop it altogether. The adoption agencies act as a linkup between the prospective parents and foreign adoption agencies.

From this point onwards, the prospective parent(s) face up the most difficult phase of the adoption process- waiting. The waiting period generally lasts for a period of five years, with one year of counselling included. More often than not, a child to be adopted is found within this period. But sometimes it happens that a suitable child for adoption is not found in this given time. In that case, the prospective parents who wish to continue with the adoption re apply to the Finnish Adoption Board to be granted a new permit to pursue a new adoption. The possibility of counselling in this period is not required as it had been performed earlier, and hence the period granted is a further five years.

### 2.3 Necessity of counselling

The social worker's assessment proves to be the most vital part of the adoption process. Counselling provides a basis for the social worker to come up with credible information in determining the wishes of the prospective adoptive parents, and then to balance those wishes to find a suitable child for them. Adoptive child needs well trained parents who have life circumstances and resources for a good chance to secure the child with a good childhood, adolescence and also enough support into adulthood. They make an assessment of the family factors they have witnessed, and write a recommendation report which is submitted to the Finnish Adoption Board in Helsinki.

Indeed, the fact is that the social worker is at the pinnacle of the adoption process since the recommendation report is most vital in the 'matching' processes. Under international standards, prospective adopters cannot "self-select": responsibility for selecting adoptive parents and "matching" them to an adoptable child therefore falls essentially to professionals (Cantwell 2010). When the Finnish Adoption Board gives a go ahead on the adoption process, then the task lies in matching the wishes of the process, but more so in finding a child that will be comfortable with the prospective adoptive parents.

The social worker serves as an agent of control (Trevithick 2010. 35). The nature of counselling offered by the social worker is meant to offer hope to the prospective adoptive parents when providing care to the new children in the family they expect to receive. But for positive change to occur in the life of a child who may have experienced a host of traumatic events or neglect, proper care needs to be provided. The hope is that by providing [proper] care for people who have not received enough, for whatever reason, we will be able to compensate for the lack of original care, and ultimately, help them to move on independently, and without the continued involvement of health and welfare services (Trevithick 2010. 35) Counselling provides a proper base for the prospective parents to get attached with the course they are pursuing, and serves as a mode of creating a basis to coach these prospective parents into a better understanding the reality of what they are getting involved in.

Counselling bears another important aspect; that of offering advice and help to the adoptive parents after the adoption process is complete. This is a duly important aspect in international adoptions, and in our case, an important part of this research. Post adoption counselling is appropriate after adoption as it helps most of the adoptive parents and families cope while raising up an adopted child, 'support the child and adoptive parents in their changed life situation' (Pelastakaa Lapset Ry

2011). These post adoption services are conducted for the adoptive family gain more information after the adoption. Thus the adopted child and the adoptive parent(s) can apply for these services. In Finland, these post adoption services are chargeable, and pay varies on the extent of the work involved in the post adoption service.

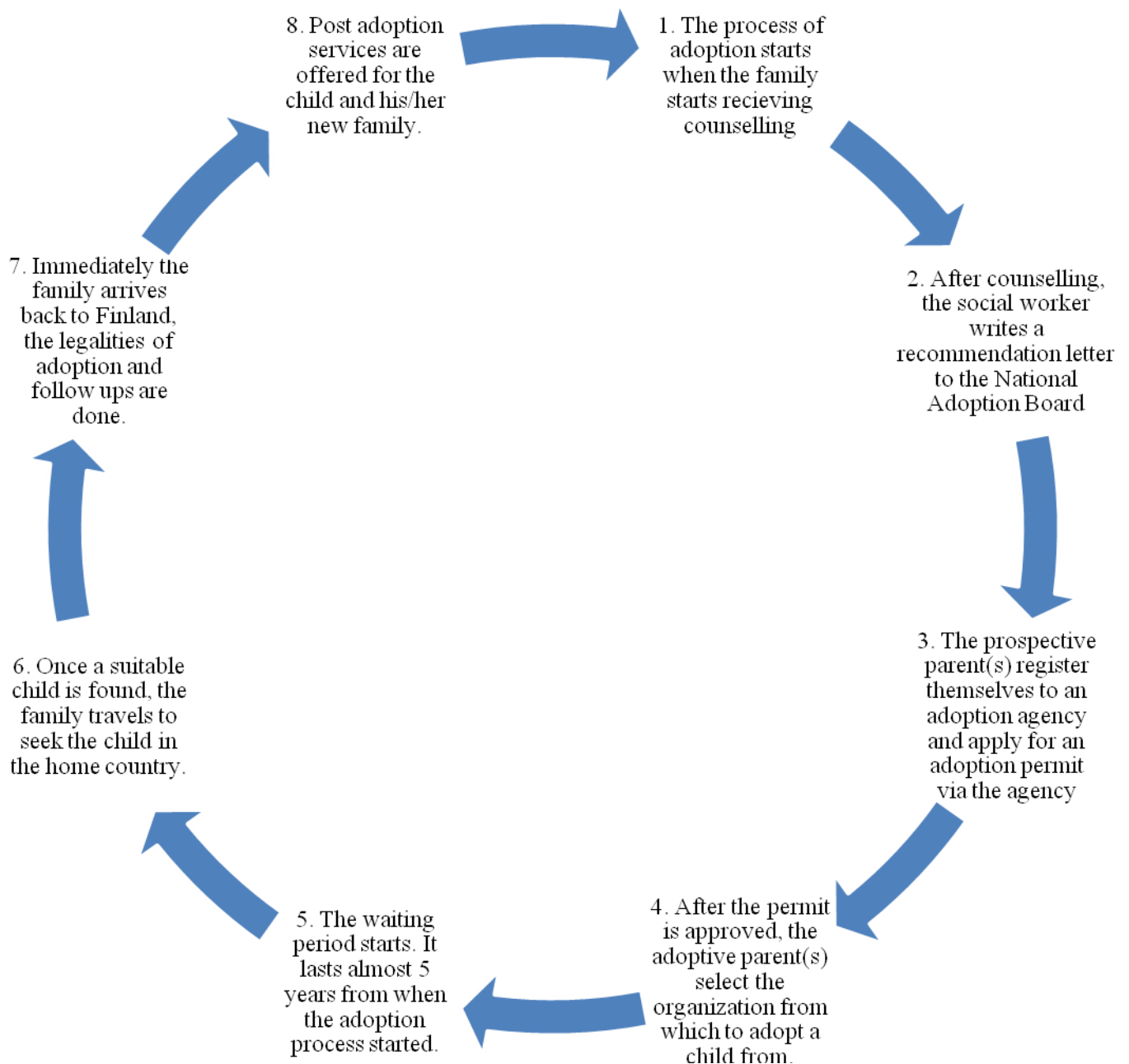


Figure 2 International adoption processes in Finland (Interpedia Ry).

The diagram above shows the sequential stages that prospective adoptive parents undergo during the adoption process. In Finland, the adoption period starts with counselling for about one year, as illustrated in step one. After the counselling period, the social worker sends the assessment of his/her observations and recommendations to the National Adoption Board in Helsinki, detailing the prospective parent(s) capabilities of raising an adopted child. The adoptive parents consequently need to register themselves in an adoption agency in Finland in order to obtain an adoption permit. After receipt of permission to adopt, the prospective adoptive parents will choose the agency they would want to process their adoption application. The reason is because the different agencies in Finland have different cooperating adoption organizations in depending on the wishes of which country to adopt from. The adoption agency chosen thus starts the search for a suitable child for the prospective parent(s) depending on the wishes they put forth. After this, the waiting period begins, which may last up to four years. If this period elapses, the prospective parents need to formally re apply again to the adoption process. On the other hand, when a child is found, the adoptive parents have to travel to the child's country of origin to meet the child, and consequently bring him/her to Finland. Immediately the child gets to Finland, all legal procedures like legally acknowledging the child with the family's name is done, and post adoption services will follow to check on the integration of the child in to the new home (Interpedia Ry 2011).

#### 2.4 Reasons for International Adoption

The reason for parents having an interest to adopt a child from another country varies widely. In Finland, the main reason for majority of international adoptions is infertility. The rates of infertility are on the rise in developing countries, and Finland is no exception. As many as one in six couples may suffer from involuntary infertility at some point in their lives (Väestöliitto 2011). And thus the wish therefore for in such a situation is to have an adopted child as one's own. During the counselling period, the couple is advised on the options in choosing the adoptions, and both the positive and negative factors are highlighted in each of the processes. An example related to this topic would be that a negative aspect of domestic adoptions tend to take long, and a more risk prone (the biological mother may rescind her decision to offer her baby for adoption after birth of the child). Hence many prospective adoption parents are looking forward to international adoptions as a better option for adoption.

Another reason for adoption might be for the purposes of choosing not to have biological children, or in many cases, choosing to have both. International adoption permits cannot be granted for reasons of charity. The reasons for international adoptions are only for formation of families, and providing the adopted child with a clear chance for livelihood. Hence adoption is not an act of heroism on the part of prospective adoptive parents, but for provision of care for a child who is in lack of such. For example, many people might think that adopting a child from Africa was done to help the child get away from a life of poverty and have a better future in Finland (Karhumäki 2005. 98).

In other instances, a Finnish citizen might get married to a person having a different nationality, who may be also having children of his/her own. In this instance, once the marriage is formally legalized in Finland, the couple might want to legally adopt the children so that they can attain residency and permanency in Finland. This is done through adoption. The Finnish citizen in this case would apply to the Finnish Adoption Board to have the children be legally adopted by him/her.



### 3 ATTACHMENT

All the way through life, emotional bonds a child forms with persons of interest; in this case, the caregiver's attachment paints their discernment and viewpoint of happenings in their life. Any kind of interruptions usually lead to attachment concerns; and often give way to social, behavioural, emotional and in other cases, mental health problems. Attachment is a term used to describe the dependency relationship a child develops towards his or her primary caregiver (Colby 2009. 13). Establishing a relationship means forming a kind of contact that is in progress, or a connection that continues over a period of time.

Concepts of attachment emanate from observations and consequent research methods carried out by John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth. Bowlby confirmed that the affection bonds formed between a mother and its child help to create a secure base, with trusted and positively motivated caregivers cultivate a sensation of self worth, poise and buoyancy, and undertake the task of ensuring emotional stability and security. This will eventually help the child develop self confidence, self reliance, trust and cooperation with others (Bowlby 1979. 117). John Bowlby was a British psychoanalyst who initiated a report and subsequent research that proved human beings have an intrinsic and basic need to form meaningful attachments with others, with emphasis in early childhood. Relying heavily on naturalistic observation, but also drawing on the results of empirical studies, Bowlby developed what we now know as 'Attachment Theory' (Colby 2009. 15). Attachment theory's basic premise is that, from the beginning of life, the baby human has a primary need to establish an emotional bond with a care-giving adult (White 2006. 6). Conversely, negative caregivers who prove to be undependable, inaccessible, unwilling to help or unsympathetic lead the children to have attitudes such as insecurity, anxiety, mistrust and lacking of self confidence. These negative experiences during the child's early life period link to the difficult behaviour or disturbed relationships in subsequent years of their lives. All in all, Bowlby determined that a child is prepared to have a committed caregiver and having an uncommitted caregiver will result in considerable effects on a child's development.

Attachment behaviour is any form of behaviour that results in a person attaining or maintaining proximity to some other preferred and differentiated individual . . . While especially evident during early childhood, attachment behaviour is held to characterize human beings from the cradle to the grave (Bowlby 1979. 129). Bowlby suggested that there is a human instinct to form an attachment

between the mother and the child, but prolonged separation from the primary caregiver and child, especially during the first years of their life is seen as a major cause of delinquent behaviour and mental health difficulties (Burrows & Berrisford & Ward 2011. 318). These concepts offer a comprehensive outlook on the emotional bonds a child forms with his or her caregivers. The attachment relationships play a key role in the child's personal development and also the perception of bonding with others. An important aspect of this theory is that it goes beyond the descriptive and includes explanations of attachment issues in a child's upbringing.

Bowlby published "Forty-Four Juvenile Thieves," the results of a study of adolescent boys who had committed crimes. Bowlby found that a number of the boys who had committed thefts had no one in their lives who was fully committed to their wellbeing. Many of these children appeared incapable of meaningful human relationships, impressing Bowlby with what he considered the devastating impact of not having a committed caregiver (Dozier, Grasso, Lindhiem & Lewis 2007. 91) In this light, Bowlby hence deduced that having a meaningful relationship with a caregiver, is essential for the growth and development of the cognitive aspect of the child. It helps the child explore the world as it is without fear, and knowing where to differentiate right from wrong.

Additionally, Mary Ainsworth, through her emotional attachment research work – the Strange Situation - identified three patterns of attachment, namely: secure, avoidant and ambivalent. A secure attachment indicates having confidence that the attachment figure will be available and respond, sensitively and benignly to the need for proximity and, if the attachment system is highly activated, the need for comfort. An insecure attachment can be described as anxious in this regard (Prior & Glaser 2006. 25). First and foremost; Ainsworth describes the secure pattern as the most favourable situation for development, because the child takes notice of the caregiver as admirable, reliable and available. The caregiver offers all the support to the child to experience the challenging but manageable environment around him/her. The child notices that the attachment figure is around and is easily accessible, and provides assurance by being present and available. He uses his mother as a secure base from which to explore and, at home, he is not likely to cry if his mother leaves the room (Prior & Glaser 2006. 25). When the child feels threatened or falls ill, the caregiver is available to provide comfort and assistance. In this case, therefore, the attachment figure is reliable and available, both emotionally and physically. The child therefore develops a relationship with the caregiver as s/he trusts that there is someone available to respond to his/her needs and wants. This is a good attachment type, as rarely do children having this kind of attachment end up in foster care or adoption.

Further, Ainsworth discovered another pattern which she describes as avoidant; the children show little response to separation (clue to danger) and conspicuous avoidance of proximity-seeking, or interaction with, the mother in the reunion episodes (Prior & Glaser 2006. 25). In this case, the child becomes unresponsive and declines relating to the caregiver, who is seen as less admirable, unavailable or harmful, hence the child feels the caregiver's support is inconsistent. Consequently the environment around is deemed hazardous. In the strange situation they respond to the mother's departures with immediate and intense distress. When picked up they may mingle angry resistance with clinging and other contact-maintaining behaviour (Prior & Glaser 2006. 25).

Finally, the ambivalent pattern comes about when the caregiver is unavailable for the needs of the child. In the strange situation they respond to the mother's departures with immediate and intense distress (Prior & Glaser 2006. 26). They are clingy and become obsessed with the caregiver when they are re united with them, but are torn between the affection they get and their feelings of anger experienced after the separation with their caregiver. They are typically difficult for the caregiver to settle and exhibit a mixture of dependency and resistance (Colby 2009. 23).

Majority of the internationally adopted children coming to Finland have previously been hosted in orphanages. The condition of care in these orphanages is collective, in that care is not as personalized as expected for a child. Thence the bonds of attachment between the caregiver and the child at that moment are not as high as would be deemed. Moreover, majority of the children hosted in the orphanages "often the child may have been through traumatic experiences and will need you [the prospective caregiver] to provide a caring and secure family environment" (Little angels' network 2011).

In our case, the attachment theory explains the nature of relationships a child will form depending on the care the child receives in his/her early years of life. Feelings of safety and security are directly influenced by the quality of the attachment the child experiences with their primary caregiver (Colby 2009. 16). As such, the connection henceforth determines the outcome of the child's behaviour and attitudes, and hence the role of a positive adoption process in fostering a better life for the child. Children are more inclined to form a close association with someone whom they feel is available for their needs. Colby describes this as a relationship that forms from intuition, as the child realizes there is someone around who offers them attention when they need it. The child is able to use the comfort s/he gets from the caregiver to explore and venture out on his/her own, knowing that the caregiver is available to help in case s/he fails. Thus the child forms a trustworthy relationship with that someone, who the child views as the primary caregiver.

### 3.1 Attachment and Internationally adopted children

Attachment and international adoption go hand in hand. The reason for this is that before the process of adoption begins, the child to be adopted would most likely have gone through a difficult or traumatic phase in their early childhood. This, coupled with other physical and social factors, may cause a difficult response of the child when being adopted, or, as is in many cases, after the adoption process has ended. As close relationships for [some of] these children have often led to abuse, fear and hurt (shame and rejection), closeness becomes equated with distress or danger and intimacy becomes something to be resisted (Colby 2009. 32). This in turn makes the children rather scared of forming close attachments in future, or in other words become more concerned when they are to form any close relationships with anyone who tends to show affection to them.

For a successful attachment to exist, the bond usually should be effective in both ways. This means that the child needs to feel loved and cared for by the adoptive parents. In turn, the parents also need also to feel that they are helping in assuring the adopted child of the love. The adoptive parents understand that majority of the adopted children might have experienced a traumatic past. They are prepared to counter this with provision of care and love the children with all the love they give.

For the parents, attachment starts when they receive word from their social worker that they can adopt, and it grows immediately they are able to view the pictures of their new child. That is why, during the counselling period, prospective parents are assessed as to whether they are capable of travelling to the receiving countries when they receive word that a suitable child is found. The Finnish national insurance institution, KELA, although able to provide grants in international adoptions for Finnish citizens, but the grants cannot cover all the administrative and travelling costs involved in the international adoption process. The length of stay in the receiving countries may also be long; hence the prospective parents need to have an active income so that they are able to save the income to support this venture.

### 3.2 Psychodynamic explanation of attachment

Psychoanalysis is based on the belief that, as human beings, we are born with the capacity of good and evil, and that much of our life is determined by the tension and conflict between these two elements (Trevithick 2010. 91). Attachment theory is a theory of child development that focuses on the influences of early relationships of children. The theory suggests that the child's subsequent

development and capacity to form either good or bad relationships will be influenced by this early experience. (Golding 2007. 23) The unique factor of attachment is drawn where the child has a tendency to prefer their primary caregivers to other adults, and ever seek comfort or protection from them during distress. The need for preference is therefore the basic feature in all attachment relationships. An overview of the relationships concerning children going through adoption will eventually lead us into understanding the various degrees of attachment that involve these children. Adoption and attachment are intertwined. To understand, and to fully organize effective, positive and productive international adoption processes, then we need to understand the viewpoint and distresses that the children undergo through.

An understanding of attachment theory is a means to appreciating the impact discontinuity of care has on a child. The basic perception is that a child has instinct to behave in many ways to maintain closeness to the caregiver, and always feels secure when they are close to this caregiver. Systematically, the child learns that there exists a particular person who is there to provide a safe, expected and a rather relaxing environment. Central to attachment theory is the concept of there being a survival advantage for the infant associated with maintaining closeness to adults and, thus, protection and accessibility to needs-provision. (Colby 2009. 16) In the child's mind, it is the beginning of a close nurturing, and development of trust. Attachment forms and develops from these elements. This is also understood as the basic developmental undertaking of the child before s/he learns how to speak. The subsequent attachment creates a secure base from which the child feels able to express and explore the larger social and natural world. But an early deficiency of care giving results in massive consequences affecting the child, since the sort of attachment that forms between the child and the caregiver generates into a 'model' for future social bonds.

In this case, attachment of the adopted child to the caregiver is of significant importance. The child, through past experiences, may likely have attachment oriented problems. This is evident, and more profound depending with the age at which the child has been adopted, coupled with the traumatic or scope of neglect. Counselling of the prospective adoptive parents, who in this case wish to be the caregivers, is essential. The attributes gained in the counselling are meant to create a cognitive paradigm for the prospective parents to 'work in a place within themselves to be disciplined, open to other people and be prepared and available to engage in the experience' of adopting. (Trevithick 2010. 44) This ensures that they are prepared for uncertainty while forging an attachment with the adopted child. Karhumäki (2005) describes the case of Neela, an internationally adopted child in Finland. Neela's first regression and recession phase came when she was two and a half years old.

She had resided with her adoptive parents for one year at that time. Neela had observed a situation another adopted child's close relationship with the mother, and this brought great worry and sadness to her caregiver (Karhumäki 2005. 111). The point to note here is that attachment between the adopted child and the adoptive parent, who happens to be the child's primary caregiver, forms over a long period of time, and any external observations in the child's environment affect the behaviour of the adopted child. Regression may occur at any time when the adopted child feels discomfort, or signs of affection need to be reassured.

From a humanistic perspective, everyone feels at peace when they have achieved some point of satisfaction after accomplishing their needs. A hierarchy of needs developed by Maslow states that 'the need for human beings to realize their full potential can only be fulfilled once the other needs have been met' (Trevithick 2010. 92). For an adopted child to get to his/full potential where they find self-fulfilment, then they need to have their basic and safety needs met. All of us need basic needs in order to survive. We all need food, shelter and clothing, after which we seek out other needs that facilitate further progress to achieve satisfaction. International adoptions relate well to this notion that, as humans, we are entitled to fully maximise our potential capabilities and this should start immediately after birth. The situation however is different for the children in orphanages, as majority of them have traumatic or disturbing pasts, and these hinder their development. International adoptions in Finland are thus designed to offer an opportunity to the adoptive parents to provide the required care and assure the adopted child of a life where they can be able to actualize their needs.

#### 4 RESEARCH PROBLEM AND METHODS OF RESEARCH

The role of adoptions has become vital in our societies, as they have become a source of hope for many persons who desire to nurture young children. The number of international adoptions in Finland is on the rise, as shown by statistical data obtained from the Finland Adoption Board (2009). International adoptions have shifted from being dealt on humanitarian grounds to a need-based phenomenon, where prospective adoptive parents and the adoptive organizations are bound by international laws (Hague Convention on Intercountry adoptions & the United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child). The questions that arise are:

- What problems are encountered during and after the process of international adoptions in Finland, and
- How do the adoptive parents cope with them during and after a successful adoption procedure?

In this research, I used a case study method, a qualitative research method, in which the theme interviews involved the parents of adopted children. This was in an attempt to understand the phenomena surrounding the internationally adopted children in Finland, and the situations the adoptive parents find themselves in while caring for them. I seek to link the theory of attachment in regard to the care internationally adopted children in Finland receive after their adoption. The idea behind using this research method is due to the nature of the adoption processes, as they are rare in Lapland region, and the number of informants was minimal. This means that a case study would be appealing to this nature of research, and thus provide a perspective of the international post adoption process.

In formulating a case study for this research, I conducted interviews in two stages. Using interviews proved to be the best option for this case study, as I wanted to get as much information about how the adoptive parents cope with their adopted children, and their reflections about adoptions. In the first stage, I contacted four organizations in Finland, one of which acts as an agency for international adoptions. Two out of the four agencies responded and offered to have interviews. The other two organizations pointed out that lack of time and personnel could not allow them to offer interviews. I conducted a telephone interview with a social worker in one of the three international adoptions agencies in Finland. I got in touch with her through an email which was provided by one my lecturer and mentors. She responded a day later, but due to her busy nature of work, the only

possible date for an interview would fall almost four weeks later. But time flew fast, and we did the hour and a half telephone interview. The other organization was with a post adoption agency, which provides post adoption counselling to adoptive families in Finland. I interviewed a social worker who is involved in planning the organizations events through a telephone interview and an open ended questionnaire, which provided more information about the nature of post adoption services they provide.

In the second stage, I did seek to interview four families in the Lapland region, whom I got into contact personally and through friends. In one of the interviews, I had to use a translator due to the language factor (from Finnish to English). Both family interviews were live interviews. The purpose for the interview was to establish their fears, ideas and expectations of the child they were about to receive before the adoptions, and their thoughts after a successful adoption process, how it affected them physically and emotionally, and most important, how they coped with the arrival of the adopted child into their home. This would help my research in getting valuable first hand information towards their desired needs and how prepared they were in receiving a child through adoption. I managed to interview two out of the four adoptive parents, as the other two were unsuccessful in finding a suitable time for me to carry out the interviews. This is as summarised by the table below.

Table 1. Interviews carried out and methods of collecting information

Interviewees	Method of collecting information
Adoptive families	Personal Interviews
Adoptive agency	telephone interview
Post adoption organizations	Telephone interviews and open ended questionnaire.

In formulating the target group and acquiring background information, literature has been most essential, in that the adaptability of attachment was focusing on the early stages of development of children. I used books and web pages that proved essential in explaining the processes involved in international adoption, and also the link between attachment and internationally adopted children. In



this research, we hoped to see whether the attachment theory was indeed evident, and how the adoptive parents and social workers have assisted one another to provide a safe environment for the adopted child to develop in. The research materials regarding international adoption from the Nordic countries also proved useful, as they outlined the achievements and challenges the ‘countries in the North’ endure before, during and most important, after the adoption.

Literature has been essential in formulating a hypothesis and creating a backdrop of this research. The research topic is rather broad, but completed research in Finland is found to be wanting. The relevancy of majority of articles as regards international adoptions proved to be wanting. The general overview thus was taken from reports, research work and books in other countries, mostly Sweden , The United Kingdom and the United States, countries with a wide array of experience in international adoptions.

A detailed and figurative perspective of the research process is as shown in the figure below, which shows when the planning of the research was done, and how long it took to complete the whole project.

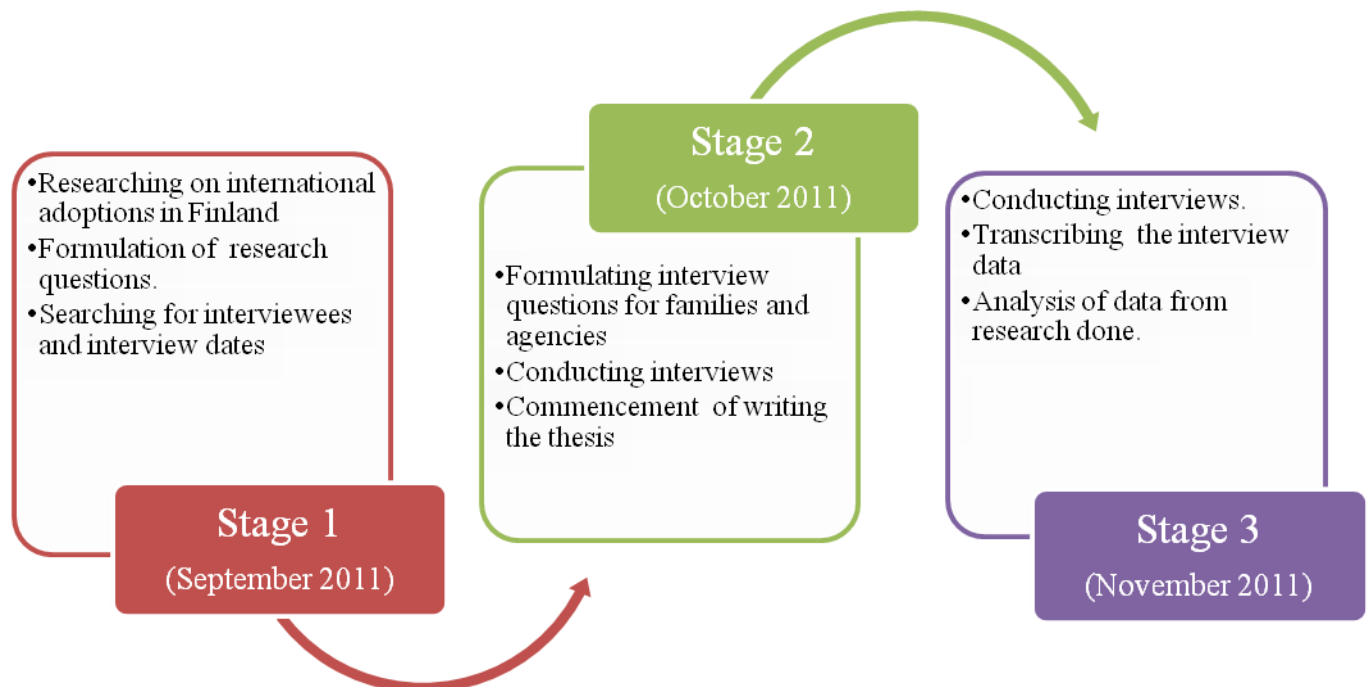


Fig 3 A diagrammatic representation of the process of this research work

The figure above shows the stages that I went through in this research work. I divided my work in three parts, which were essential in planning and effectively carrying out the research work. In the first part, I did seek material through literature about the situation of international adoptions in Finland in order to formulate research questions for the purpose of a detailed research. I also contacted several organizations about my nature of research, and the families I wished to interview. In the second stage, I formulated the interview questions for both the adoptive families and the organizations. In this stage, I also conducted interviews to both families and the adoption organizations. The interviews conducted were helpful and concise to enable a clear analysis of the information obtained, and hence I began writing my thesis. The third and final stage involved transcribing the data that I had received from the interviews and analysis for the purposes of this research.

## 5 RESEARCH ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

In an evolutionary sense, a secure attachment among human beings increases the chances of survival, and the lack of a primary attachment relationship means increased risk for later life problems. According to attachment theory, experiences of care provided by attachment caregivers are encoded as internal representational models, which will influence an individual's capability of forming attachment relations in the future. These internal working models are the cogs and wheels of the inner world, in which the child forms representations of self, of others and of how to interact. In attachment theory, an attachment is a tie based on the need for safety, security and protection. This need is paramount in infancy and childhood, when the developing individual is immature and vulnerable. The attachment figure's equivalent tie to the child is termed the 'caregiving bond' (Prior & Glaser 2006. 15)

For purposes of this research, I opted to use the constant comparison method, a ground based analysis method to analyse this information. The purpose was to use the information from the interviews I conducted to the families and initiate a comparison with the material I had collected from literature and material information from interviewing the adoption agencies. With the nature of my research, this proved to be the easiest and most effective research analysis method at my disposal, and it proved effective as I got to come up with suitable results.

### 5.1 Attachment at home

Attachment is a key element in adoption. Whether it is from the prospective parents viewpoint or that of the yet to be adopted child, attachment is of main concern. The age of the child is considered a major factor for both domestic and international adoptions. It is actually one of the bargaining factors in the prospective parents' wish list for a child. Few parents aspire to adopt a relatively older child as compared to a younger one. The scenario is that they wish to adopt a child as young as possible.

*"Since we couldn't get a child of our own, our initial and only decision was to adopt a young healthy child"* (Interviewed family 1, 25.09.2011).

*“We did not have any special wishes for the child we wanted to adopt as regards the age. Now that he is here, we love him as our own”* (Interviewed family 2, 24.10.2011).

Both families, when asked of their wishes from what they expected of the child they were willing to adopt, the answer was rather unanimous. Both families expected the child to be young. They explained that it was easier for them to provide care for a child who was young. They explained that it felt easier to form a close relationship with a young child, and facilitates an easy process for development with the young one. This was a clear demonstration that prospective parents are keen on the value of the bond they want to form with the child. Attachment is a nurtured system of forming a trusting relationship between the child and its parents. It needs belief, care and time for it to grow and mature on its own. From the interviews, I garnered that families are willing to adopt a child who is as young as possible. The younger the child is, the better chances are for a smooth transition of attachment between the parents and the adopted child. Caregivers of attachment-disordered children should provide the kind of structured, understanding, responsive and regulated care environment that supports and nurtures the development of secure attachment relationships in young children and facilitates their positive socialisation (Colby 2009. 60). According to one research, children who had spent at least 8 months in a Romanian orphanage had more insecure patterns of attachment than children who were not adopted or those who had been adopted earlier, and at follow-up at 6 years of age, they more often had signs of conduct and attention difficulties (Hjern, Lindblad & Vinnerljung 2002. 5)

*“When he arrived here and stayed with us for a while, he became drawn away from me. It seemed to me that he did not want any help for me. He was always fond of my husband, and would only let him near him”* (Interviewed family 2, 24.10.2011).

Attachment to the new family proves to be a treacherous invention, mostly emotionally and at times physically. Prospective adoptive parents must understand that adoptive parenthood is going to be a special and demanding task (Kumpuläki 2006. 7). Earlier intimate relationships of the adopted children may often have led to abuse, fear or harm. So for them, the case might be that intimacy turns out to be associated with agony or risk, and automatically the child resists some or any kind of it. No matter how devoted the new parent(s) tries to be or tries to show intimacy to the child; the more intimidating they appear to the child. This situation leads the child to choose one or both of

the caregivers as a hate object. Some children are very wise in their choice of the hate object. This happens to an individual who, because of his or her reliability, consistency and predictability, gives the child a sense of security and safety (Trevithick 2010. 45).

With regard to knowing self, and placing empathy on the forefront, the adoptive parent acknowledges this experience as signs of gradual healing of the adopted child. Enabling the child to let out these feelings of negativity helps the adopted child to learn and realize with time that the adoptive parents care when they consistently offer help and assisting the adopted child with his/her daily routine at home.

*“We offer counselling to provide the prospective adoptive parents with a head-start in dealing with any experiences they might come across when the adopted child is in their realm which might appear stranger than usual”* (Social worker 2, 14.11.2011, telephone interview)

All children need assurances. They feel less in doubt if they are assured of how much loved they are. In association with care that is consistent, sensitive and encouraging of their efforts, the infant perceives him or herself to be good, lovable and competent (Colby 2008.18).

*“Once our biological daughter came forward to ask us if her inheritance is in doubt now that we have adopted a child”* (Interviewed family 2).

In families that have biological children when deciding to adopt, then the task becomes more vital. In a family, where there are biological children, the siblings may fail to fully accept the adopted child as a bona fide sibling, especially in matters of inheritance. Parents have to assure both the adopted child and the biological child of the circumstances that led to adopt, and assure them both of similar love. When adoption takes place between different countries - especially when the children look different from their new parents and kin, as they do when they are moved from countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America to Europe and North America - questions of identity, belonging, race, ethnicity, and culture are on the agenda (Marre & Briggs 2009. 224).

Background information is a vital part for the adoption process, both to the prospective parents and to the child. This helps them to understand the child better, thus enhancing ways to form a close bond with the child, especially in the case of a relatively older child. When older children are adopted, the main objective is to help them gradually adapt to the family and feel included in

society. (Marre & Briggs 2009. 234) The socio-cultural environment of the child before adoption provides key insights into certain behaviours that s/he will exhibit later in life (Dambach 2009. 7).

*“The prospective parents need to travel to the adopted child’s country of origin to see for themselves the environment from which they are seeking to adopt a child from”* social worker 1, 14.10.2011. Telephone interview

The cultural values the child might have held before coming to Finland should not be diminished to done away with completely. For example, if a child comes from a society that shares food equally before eating, and saying a prayer before that, the new adoptive parents should show concern for this type of culture if the child is used to it, and let the child keep up with the norms his/her ancestors possess.

*“Giving the adopted children an opportunity to be self, to have the same original name they hold is vital for their psychological growth, and this proves to be important for the child in knowing him/herself”* (Interviewed family 2, 24.10.2011).

This is important in combining some of the child’s new culture with his/her original way of life. For example, retaining the original name of the child is vital for the child’s psychological growth. The belief is that, the name carries a piece of the child’s past, and is therefore valuable. The opinions of the child are to be welcomed, especially to an older child who has become more accustomed to his/her name.

The legislation in many countries that are involved in sending children for international adoption is changing. This coupled with the huge demand of children to be adopted, take the levels of adoption to new heights, as the competition among receiving countries ensues. This in turn increases the waiting periods for the adoption process, which is directly felt by the prospective parents.

*“the hardest part was waiting, as we waited for three and a half years without any word from the adoption agency, and didn’t know if we were eventually going to get the child for adoption or not”* (Interviewed family 1, 25.09.2011)

*“and it was a trying period for us as a family, to wait for the unexpected outcome, but we prayed for a positive answer, and were happy when we got that call from the adoption agency that a child had been found”*

(Interviewed family 2, 24.10.2011)

In both cases, the adoptive parents were worried during the long periods of waiting times. This time proves to be the hardest for both families, compared even to the post adoption period. The uncertainty, coupled with the fact that the adoption agencies are mum about the progress of the adoption cases proves entirely a difficult phase to endure. Although not much can be done to change this situation, it is of much concern as it drains the energies of these prospective parents. The long waiting periods have proved to be a disappointing trend, as many wishing to adopt again have been discouraged by the long waiting periods. Both families from the interviews attributed this to the ‘difficult conditions set international adoptions by the sending countries’.

*“We considering which countries to adopt from, we became astounded by the ridiculous requirements some foreign adoption agencies had. The nature of material possessions for them proved to ascertain that only rich families had the right to adopt”* (Interviewed family 2, 24.10.2011)

## 5.2 Attachment within the Community

The environment surrounding the adopted child is also vital for his/her development. Fostering positive attachment is important in regard to the child feeling accepted in the society without any perceived prejudice. The adopted children witness a lot of transformation of environment, society and language, but this is inevitably not a case for them not to achieve a clear understanding of the new surroundings.

For adoptive parents, bonding is just one hurdle. They, almost certainly, still have to wade through the phase when the child tries to make sense of who he or she really is. And this is the most important part of nurturing the bonding that has developed right out from the early periods of attachment.

*“We have always shown our seven year old child that he is no different from any other child of his age. We try to teach him to be confident in*

*himself, and no matter what, we love him.”* (Interviewed family 2. 24.10.2011)

Irrespective of how much love you have smothered the child with, s/he will want to know where they came from as part of forming an identity. There comes a time when the child notices that his features are different. If the child finds out that she or he was adopted at that time, they can feel betrayed and cheated and this can cause them to act rebelliously towards the adoptive parents. Thence it is of importance for the adoptive parent(s) to share with their adopted child the reasons and truths regarding his origins. Adoptive parents devote considerable effort to highlighting the differences between themselves and their children. But at the same time, they feel that attachment transcends difference confirming the value and importance of their task (Marre & Briggs 2009. 236). A strong and secure attachment relationship facilitates the ability to enjoy full and satisfying life experiences throughout the life-span.

*For us, race was not an issue when considering adoption. The only thing we cared about was getting a child whom we could nurture, and that is the most important aspect of adoption* (Interviewed family 1, 25.09.2011)

There are realistic grounds for believing that in terms of race relations, the prospective parents are also beyond that. The question of race did not matter at all. Both families from whom I interviewed had neither any objections whatsoever on the kind of skin colour the child possessed nor the racial background of the biological parents. Attitudes toward immigrants vary widely and the subject is increasingly controversial, opinion toward children being adopted from other countries is generally positive (Marre & Briggs 2009. 228). In early contemporary societies like Great Britain or United States, for example, the issue of race was of concern to many families who opted to adopt. It was a stigma to adopt a rather different child in terms of the colour of skin. In the United States, for example, federal adoption reforms in the mid-1990s that put an end to race as a consideration in adoption placement had a swift impact on media representation of trans-racial adopters (Gailey 48). Adoptive parents are confident of their capacity to ensure that their racially different children will be integrated into their families and nation (Marre & Briggs 2009. 237).

Having gone through the importance of counselling and what it entails, prospective adoptive parents are moulded to be open and freely aspiring to adopt. Parents who are in the process of adoption are easily inclined to love and appreciate the gift of a young child into their home. When the adoption process turns positive for them and they receive pictures detailing the child chosen for them, and



approve it, the attachment process for these parents starts there. They develop a fondness that proves vital in the days running into meeting the child in his/her home country.

*“When my brother tried to adopt for the first time, the adoption agency initially sent the wrong pictures of the child they were about to adopt; and although the mistake was rectified after a couple of weeks, my brother and his wife were clearly devastated by this mishap”* (Interviewed family 2. 24.10.2011).

The adoption agencies keenly monitor the process of adoption, and how messages are conveyed once a suitable child has been found. Although a mix up might occur at some stage, it is vital that in the event that it happens, no time should be wasted in trying to rectify it. For credibility of international adoptions as a profession, mistakes should be unheard of. This is highly important as not to dampen the hopes and aspirations of the prospective adoptive parents.

### 5.3 Agency support and the theory of attachment

After the adoption process is complete, the task of raising the adopted child does not solely remain at the hands of the new parent(s). Support is essential for the new family. Successful adoption placement doesn't end at the moment of homecoming; legislation, preparation of prospective adoptive parents and the child and cooperation between authorities and adoption organizations ground a basement for the lifelong growth of the adopted child (Kumpumäki 2006). With older children adopted, their attachment with both the new family and the new environment seem out of their existence. It always proves difficult in the beginning, as the children have an unstable attitude, and seem confused. It is vital, at this point, to have support in improving their understanding of their new lives. The agencies dealing with international adoptions in Finland, directly or indirectly offer ways and means to improve this situation.

*“They [the members] get regularly our magazine and letters. All the activities are open for everybody, that is, they do not have to be members in order to take part. Membership is more a way to support our mission and values.”* (Social worker 2, 14.11.2011, telephone interview)

The adoption agencies, in conjunction with the adoption organizations, provide post adoption services to the new parents which facilitate an easy transition of the adopted child. Adoption proves

to be a life changing situation. Adoption support groups can be a lifesaver for the new parent(s) when confronted with a disappointment (Sember 2003. 133). They offer valuable information that is used to make adjustments with the gradual growth and development of the child.

*“We inform families about our own activities and about activities arranged by others. We have a magazine, newsletter and website. We organize lectures, courses, peer support and we have adoption counselling (separate information) among other things”* (Social worker 2, 14.11.2011, telephone interview).

Usually, with internationally adopted children, these adjustments are distressing periods because of the new environment they find themselves in and more serious with the advance in age. The agencies offer as much support as they can to the parents who are facing difficulties with their adopted child. After settling in, these children experience a host of different emotions, which affect their personal development.

*“They may have problems associated with sleeping, learning eating or even more severe like bullying or violent prone personalities, and as social workers, we at the agencies have to work hand in hand with the new parents to help them”* (Social worker 1, 14.10.2011, telephone interview).

Doubts may occur even after the adoption process is complete. The post adoption services try to assist new adoptive parents to overcome the challenges, most common involving attachment bonding.

*“We offer post adoption services to the new parents who seek our help when they are not able to effectively take care of the child, mostly due to his/her mental state of health. The child might have had an unknown difficult phase before arriving to Finland, and turns out to be problematic for him/her in the new environment”* (Social worker 1, 14.10.2011, telephone interview).

In some cases, the new parent(s) may find it quite an uphill task to care for the adopted child, most often due to the child's past. The newly adopted child may be undergoing a sequence of change to counter a traumatic past, and may turn out to be a disheartening period for the new parents also. The

social workers in turn have to assist these new parents to come into terms with the situation, and offer support in form of counselling, and also provide encouragement for them during this tumultuous period.

*“With the many children waiting to get a better life, I think international adoption should be encouraged”.* (Interviewed family 1, 25.09.2011)

There are many children in orphanages waiting to be adopted, both locally and internationally. When no one is interested in adopting a child in the sending country, then the focus turns to international adoption. The search begins to find a suitable family for the child. But this process means that the waiting period, both for the child and the prospective parents, is long.

*“We would like to have another adopted child, but the waiting period cause a lot of emotional agony that, and that is something we would carefully consider before doing it again”* (Interviewed family 1, 25.09.2011)

With the current international laws, the long waiting periods seem to be here for a while. Before a child gets to his/her new adoptive family, it takes a while, meaning that the subsequent development is hampered because of this delay.

The social workers are mandated to provide proper assessment of the family conditions for the adopted child's future life in Finland. The long waiting periods are due to dwindling numbers of the number of children waiting to be adopted while the demand for the same is on the rise. This has created a dilemma for both adoptive agencies and the prospective adoptive parents. This has led to a new phenomenon that raises both concern and worry. The children that are lying in wait in the orphanages might have an ailment or disability, and the wait to be selected for adoption, coupled with a traumatic experience, makes it harder for them to easily form attachments in future.

## 6 CONCLUSION

### 6.1 Discussion

Attachment between the adopted child and the new parents is of concern in Finland due to the age at which children are adopted. The age at which children are adopted to Finland seems to be on the increase (Finnish Board of Inter-Country Adoption Affairs, 2010). This being the case, they might be suspect to early attachment problems as they are accepted in their new families. The path to successful attachment tries to minimise or do away with any sort of aggression on the part of the child towards his/her new caregiver, in this case, the adoptive parent. This results to the child developing respect and added value to the new bond between him/her and the caregiver.

I found out that in order to effect change in the lives of the adopted children, it is essential for the prospective parents learn how to control the behaviour of these children, in a manner that doesn't frighten the adopted child. The adoptive parents are ready to offer their best care in order to foster a close relationship with the adopted child.

From the interviews I carried out on the adoptive parents, their main concern is giving the best care they can, and the future was not a worry for them. They only were focused in assisting the children be optimistic about themselves, and be in control of their own lives.

*“People viewed his hair as strange, and because of that they wanted to touch it all the time. We told him if he did not like this, he could always tell anyone who asked to do this that he did not want them touching his hair”*

(Interviewed family 2. 24.10.2011).

Insecure children do not know their stand between good or bad. They usually do not know if they act right or wrong. As long as they view themselves to be bad, they will do badly. They won't know how to differentiate between what is positive and what is not. Constantly preoccupied with getting the proper attention they need from intrusive but erratic care-givers, children alternate in response to their agitation and frustration between anger and despair (Hart & Luckock 2004. 45). The element of stability for them results aggression or violent behaviour to counter balance their view of the environment as uncaring or full of chaos. Good attachments and resilience are likely to be key contributors to successful transitions made (Burrows, et al. 2011). The caregiver in these instances

provide a time for development for the adopted children and help them to form a realistic view of the life ahead of them during the transition period, and also after. The adopted child shows signs of progress when s/he is able to accept the normalities of his/her behaviour, and conforms to these, when at home, school or in the neighbourhood.

In the case of the adopted children in Finland, they seemed well included in the family setting, and thoroughly settled. This does not mean, however, that they are free from the hassles and bustles of dealing with attachment concerns in the future. We have seen that children get to have severe attachment problems when they are adopted at an older age as compared to those at an early one. Retrospectively, adoptions have improved the lives of countless children all over the world. They provide a safe haven for destitute children, offering them a new chance to experience childhood. The effect of their traumatic past, however, doesn't go unnoticed. They usually appear in form of regret, violence or segregation when a true attachment is trying to be formed by the new adoptive parents. In one of the interviewed cases, the adopted child's spasms started a couple of months after he was finally adopted, evidencing a need for thorough counselling before the adoption period formally starts with the wait for a child. Similar experiences were observed in the compilation of stories by Karhumäki (2005). The reality is that internationally adopted children possess a will power to change, and the only way to get their traumatic past is through proper fostering, meaning that their feelings, background and aspirations should be well known to the parents in order to achieve this.

International adoptions provide children and their new parents with an opportunity to re organize childhood and family life. Neglect, maltreatment and instability mark out the adopted child's path to placement. Good emotional experiences in the new families do not add up to sufficient condition for shifting the children's resilience if the care planning does not assure them of a certain way of life. The adopted children would need to know how much to invest in this new relationship and attachment thus becomes whole-souled only when the children are certain of the implications. In a situation where a strong, secure and reliable relationship with the caregiver exists, the adopted child is more or less likely to be empowered to venture out into the environment surrounding him/her and consider taking risks, understand challenges and recognize how to deal with failure or loss. A strong secure and attachment relationship provides a proficiency to maximise on a full and satisfactory life know how for the adopted child.

In the interviews I carried out with the adoptive parents, they were ready to help their children by equipping them with significant and caring relationships to overcome adversities and prejudice.

They help the children to develop an ability to adapt to their new environment. Contrary to most immigrants in Finland, international adoptees are raised in Finnish culture and they usually have no accent in their speech. Still, at first sight, the adoptees are typically considered foreigners in their home country (Virkki 2008). Internationally adopted children, in majority of the cases, do not resemble their adoptive parents. This forms a transition period for the children from a different environment, culturally, physically and socially, to a new one. Therefore, the adoptive parents have a task of assuring their adopted children of their cultural identities.

The adopted child sees the caregiver as a model for development, and they act as a mirror to reflect on. The image of the caregiver towards the adopted child creates a background for the personality s/he forms in later life. The caregiver thus has a responsibility to act in a way that the child sees as forthcoming for his/her development. The previous social environment before adoption of a child proves to be detrimental, and therefore the need for the new caregiver to be someone worth of the child's trust, and mould themselves to offer their very best.

Prospective parents are taught and moulded into loving the child they seek in the same way they would if the child was biologically procured. I found out that the prospective parents develop a close attachment with the child to be adopted immediately they are informed of the decision, and get to view the pictures of their precious gift. Any event of a mix up at any stage of the adoption process certainly would bring unwarranted consequences to them, having been weighed down already by the waiting process. Hence it is important that the adoption process needs to be thorough clear and without hiccups when connecting both the prospective parents and the child to be adopted. Any mistakes should be avoided as much as it is humanly possible. This will serve to protect the prospective parents and the child to be adopted from any misgivings.

International adoption has, and is still going on a transitional phase. With this in mind, it leaves to question how the future holds for the international adoption process. The backlog and queuing of prospective adoption parents is on the rise, thanks to the high rate of infertilities and increased domestic adoptions in the sending countries. Although many governments and non-governmental adoption agencies involved in adoption are working round the clock in seeking solutions, time is always on the other side. The outlook, though, is fairly bright. The cooperation between the Nordic countries through the Nordic Adoption Council run initiatives that look over matters of improving the adoption processes.

The attachment theory discerns that different care methods will provoke different attachment styles. It is also worth noting that the attachment theory may be somehow viewed as a modern concept originating from a Western society, whereby a single carer is responsible for the child's upbringing. In other societies, the extended family is the basis of child rearing. As a student originating from Africa, the type of child upbringing differs greatly when compared to the European model. In my thinking, therefore, attachment in the case of internationally adopted children needs to be simulated in both models. The caregivers need to understand what kind of attachment the child had before coming into contact with them, and how to re adjust the child's view in this regard so as not to arouse suspicion when building on the trust between them. In this regard, therefore, it is important to be keen not to make assumptions as to what is or what is not a proper attachment.

When I set out to create the questions for both the agencies and adoptive families, it was for the purpose of gaining more knowledge of how they assist the adoptive parents to give a meaningful life to the new adopted children. The questions proved vital to get information from both sides, and create a case from each. The adoptive parents were happy with having an adopted child, and graced this with joy to cater for their needs.

Also, the adoptive parents felt that the waiting periods were very long, and coupled with the number of children waiting to be 'rescued from their misery' in the orphanages, it did not make sense. They viewed bureaucracy as a major source that slows down this process. Personally, I would agree with them in this case. Although the process of international adoption is bound by international adoption laws to create fairness, also the same laws should be suited for the best interest of the children, that is, giving the children a caregiver as soon as possible.

## 6.2 Validity

In the beginning of my studies, I studied about the attachment theory and what the effects of insecure attachment on children are. I had other options to research on, but one day I saw a child in the bus, and I wondered how it would be for them to form attachments, and how the child I had just seen copes with his new family. Instantly, I got the idea of finding out more on this topic, especially on the trials of adoptive parents. I would say that it was a difficult phase, when trying to get adoptive parents in this region that I study and also live in. But with help from friends, I did manage to get a couple of families to interview. In the end, I interviewed only two adoptive families. I understood the nature of this research work, as adoption itself is bound by law to be secretive, and

information cannot be freely passed to anyone. But I am indeed grateful for the families I interviewed, as the cases were worthy of this research.

One of the questions I asked the parents was whether they were interested in adopting again. Both families would want that so much, but the process is long enough to discourage them to do it again. So the emphasis lies on the international adoption agencies to try and work out this issue, and if possible, find a possible solution to these long waiting times. In my view, this may seem impossible, but by putting much more thought into it, we could come up with a solution, if not an alternative.

Due to the nature of adoptions, I have protected the names of the interviewed families and the agencies, including all the interview material. As of now, all material is nonexistent, as it has been destroyed to avoid any danger of privacy encroachment. The questions I asked, especially to the social workers in the agencies, were meant to provide further information which I could not get from research work that had been done earlier. They were also meant to verify what I had also researched about from the literature, and compare with other countries material, as adoption research done in English in Finland is minimal.

Although I am very satisfied with my research work, the process has not been easy. The main problem I faced in carrying out this research was to do with time. Personally, I think that more could have been achieved if there was a possibility to get more interviews from adoptive families. Contacting the adoptive families and the adoption organizations, and setting interview dates meant a lot of planning. Time was therefore of great importance. It is noteworthy to have more time for subsequent research endeavours in order to capitalize on broadening this issue.

The other shortfall was to do with getting families to interview. The statistical data from the Finnish Adoption Board (2010) shows that only a few families (3 in this case), did seek for applications for international adoptions from the Lapland region, as compared to 108 families in southern Finland. (Finnish Board of Inter-Country Adoption Affairs 2010) Although I did manage contact four families, three responded positively, but it was only possible to conduct interviews with two families. The other family put off the planned interview without a reason, which left me in a worried state. But to my best abilities, I capitalized on the two adoptive families that offered to be interviewed.



Language proved to be a problem in some stages, as although I did have translator in one of the interviews, I probably would have garnered more information if I and the interview family shared a common language.

### 6.3 A Challenge for the Future

The future of international adoptions is unknown. But what we know for a fact is that it has, and is still ongoing, but the challenges that come along with it are increasing. More work and research is due in an effort to finding solutions, for example, to the long waiting periods. Although we still have a long way to go in getting this information, the focus is set on how well adapted the internationally adopted children eventually fair in their adoptive countries. Lest we forget, the adopted children are faced with some barriers, both seen and unseen. It is, therefore, my expectation later to further my research into the world of adopted children in Finland, to seek and understand the way of life for them when they enter adulthood. This, to me, sounds like a great step in determining the problems they have endured, and seek ways in improving the greater picture of international adoptions in Finland.

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## APPENDIX 1

- Questions for the adoption agencies:

To what has the process of international adoptions in Finland evolved to today?

How do you assess adoptive parents?

What are the main concerns you have come across when assisting in adopting internationally?

How do you co relate with other organizations in foreign lands to make international adoption safe?

How are the international adoption processed?

How do you deal with the problem of integrating internationally adopted children?

What is the view if the baby is different (Non-Nordic)?

What are the most common challenges families go through during the adoption process?

After adoption, who is concerned with the social welfare of the child?

- Questions to the families:

What is your general feeling towards adoptions?

What led you to consider adopting?

How long did the whole process of adoption last, and what is your view about this?

When considering adoption, did you have any wishes concerning the baby?

Did the background of the baby matter?

Do you think adoption should be encouraged in the society we live in?

Do you have any general concerns for the baby's future when integrating in the society?

Do you receive any post adoption support? If so, what does it involve?

How do you take that fact that there are many children to be adopted yet so few are internationally adopted?

What do you think about the whole adoption process?

